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Unveiling the Silence: The Crucial Role of Muslim Intellectuals in Promoting Peace within Islam

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Abstract

In an era of escalating anti-Islamic sentiments, the absence of vocal engagement from Muslim intellectuals unintentionally facilitates recruitment efforts of extremists targeting Muslim youth. Extremist groups exploit a narrative positioning themselves as the sole defenders of Islam, distorting its essence and fuelling further radicalisation. Despite the potential for religions to foster peace, the silence of Muslim intellectuals creates a void exploited by extremist groups, hindering peace efforts within Islam. This study explores the reasons behind this silence and emphasises the critical role of Muslim intellectuals in promoting peace within their religion. Through an extrapolation analysis of existing data and literature, this study identifies challenges and perceptions of tolerance in Islam, the role of religion and religious figures in peace-making, and strategies for countering misconceptions about the rejection of violence by Islam. The findings reveal a lack of confidence among Muslim intellectuals, intensified by pervasive Islamophobia and dilemmas in advocating for peace amidst political polarisation. Therefore, urgent action is needed to empower Muslim intellectuals in supporting the message of peace and countering extremist narratives within Islam, thereby contributing to global peace efforts.

Keywords: Muslim Intellectuals; Islamophobia; Peace making; Radicalization; Tolerance in Islam

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INTRODUCTION

In an era marked by rising anti-Islamic sentiments that portray Islam as a religion associated with violence and backwardness, the absence of vocal engagement from Muslim intellectuals inadvertently facilitates the recruitment efforts of extremist and terrorist groups targeting Muslim youth (Mirzaei, 2022, p. 45). These groups propagate a narrative positioning themselves as the sole defenders of Islam, presenting their radical approach as the only means to uphold the faith. Consequently, this exploitation of religion for political gains not only distorts the true essence of Islam but also amplifies divisions within communities, fuelling further radicalization (Mirzaei, 2022) and (Haseeb Shabbir, Paul Baines, Dianne Dean & Kurt Braddock, 2023). In an era marked by rising anti-Islamic sentiments that portray Islam as a religion associated with violence and backwardness, the absence of vocal engagement from Muslim intellectuals inadvertently facilitates the recruitment efforts of extremist and terrorist groups targeting Muslim youth (Mirzaei, 2022). These groups propagate a narrative positioning themselves as the sole defenders of Islam, presenting their radical approach as the only means to uphold the faith. Consequently, this exploitation of religion for political gains not only distorts the true essence of Islam but also amplifies divisions within communities, fuelling further radicalization (Mirzaei, 2022) and (Haseeb Shabbir, Paul Baines, Dianne Dean & Kurt Braddock, 2023).

Muslim intellectuals have been instrumental in fostering dialogue, fostering interfaith harmony and challenging misconceptions that fuel hatred and division. Their scholarly insights and intellectual discourse provide a counter-narrative to extremist ideologies and inspire positive change within Muslim communities and beyond (Andrabi, 2023, p. 12). However, the contemporary challenges posed by radicalization, Islamophobia, and the weaponization of religion necessitate a renewed commitment from Muslim intellectuals to stand firmly in defense of their peace-making principles (Mirzaei, 2022, p. 45) and (Muhammad Haroon and Khaleeq Ur Rehman, 2023). Despite the potential for religions to foster peace, the silence of Muslim intellectuals on this matter creates a void exploited by extremist groups. Muslim intellectuals hold significant importance in shaping the narrative surrounding Islam and its principles of peace and coexistence (Abu-Nimer, 2000, p. 240). As ambassadors of knowledge, thought, and interpretation within the Islamic tradition, these intellectuals play a pivotal role in countering extremist ideologies and promoting the true essence of Islam as a religion of peace-making (Harold Coward and Gordon S. Smith, 2004, p. 67). With the rise of extremist groups exploiting religion for their nefarious agendas, there has been an urgent call for Muslim intellectuals to actively engage in reclaiming the narrative and elucidating the authentic teachings of Islam.

The current study endeavours to unravel the reasons behind this silence and emphasize the critical role that Muslim intellectuals can play in promoting peace within their religion. This research aims to explore the multifaceted role of Muslim scholars in advocating for peace, understanding their challenges, contributions, and strategies in confronting the distortions of Islam and championing its message of harmony and compassion. Through an in-depth analysis of their writings, teachings, and activism, this study highlights their role in fostering a culture of peace and mutual respect in today's increasingly polarized world. This study underscores the crucial role of Muslim intellectuals in advocating for peace within their religion, aligning with the sixteenth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of the United Nations (UN), which is for international peace and security (Foyasal Khan and Mohamed Aslam Haneef, 2022). By actively promoting peace-making principles, they contribute significantly to global peace efforts. Conversely, their silence risks perpetuating misconceptions about Islam, aiding extremist groups, and hindering Muslim engagement in achieving peace and safety (Jamil, 2019, p. 52).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Role of Religion and Religious Figures in Peace-Making

Religion plays a crucial role in building peace-making. The ample evidence demonstrates the involvement of religion and religious figures in various historical periods in promoting and maintaining peace. Smock (2006) has documented that religion potentially contributes to peace-making, often overshadowed by religious conflict, is gradually being acknowledged and explored (Smock, 2006, p. 23). All three major Abrahamic faiths Judaism, Christianity, and Islam contain strong principles advocating peace-making. Religious leaders and institutions have been instrumental in mediating conflicts and facilitating peace agreements throughout history. For instance, the World Council of Churches and all Africa Conference of Churches played a pivotal role in mediating Sudan's short-lived 1972 peace agreement (Gatu, 2015, p. 78). Similarly, churches in South Africa were actively involved in the struggle against apartheid and the subsequent peaceful transition. One of the most notable examples is the successful mediation by the Rome-based Community of Sant'Egidio, which contributed to ending the civil war in Mozambique in 1992 (Weimer, 2020, p. 15) and (Hume, 1994, p. 112).

Many factors contribute to the potential for religions to make peace, with religious figures playing a significant role. According to Kristian Berg Harpviken and Hanne Eggen Røislien (2005), religious actors leverage their moral stature and perceived impartiality to engage with multiple parties involved in conflicts. People typically expect religion, especially its leaders, to be involved in peace-building efforts because they are intimately connected to the religion and the people (Kristian Berg Harpviken and Hanne Eggen Røislien, 2005, p. 34). As (Joniel, 2017) argues, religious leaders are the closest to grassroots citizens and thus possess a unique ability to influence them toward peaceful living (Joniel, 2017, p. 5). Numerous examples demonstrate how religious leaders have taken the initiative in peace-making endeavours, such as the case documented by Payne (2020) during the conflict in the Solomon Islands, where young monks positioned themselves on the front lines as a neutral intermediary between warring factions (Payne, 2020, p. 167).

A study examined the conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa, emphasizing the religious aspect and the involvement of faith-based actors in peacebuilding. It observes a rise in religious violence and suggests that the related organizations are valuable but underutilized in conflict resolution. While religious narratives can divide and unite, various religious actors can contribute to peacebuilding. However, the religious actors alone cannot address all underlying issues like inequality and structural problems affecting conflict and peace (Rugar, 2020, p. 89).

Role of Islam in Peace-Building

The term "Islam" translates to "peace and submission." Muslims commonly greet each other with the phrase "Assalamun alaikum" meaning "peace be upon you." Like adherents of many faiths, most Muslims aspire to a world of justice and peace. The Qur'an teaches that Allah urges Muslims to restrain their aggression and approach others with peaceful intentions (Abdulaev, 2023). Consequently, many Muslims and non-Muslims alike believe that the essence of Islam is rooted in the concept of peace, reflected in its very name derived from the Arabic word "Silm". However, in specific contexts, particularly concerning self-defence in occupied Muslim territories, some argue that Islam does not inherently signify peace but rather emphasizes submission to God (Afsaruddin, *The Concept of Peace in Islam*, 2021, p. 120). This perspective challenges the notion of Islam as a religion solely focused on peace. Instead, it suggests Islam encompasses a broader concept of submission and obedience to divine will (Ebrahimi, Mansoureh and Kamaruzaman Yusoff, 2017, p. 330). However, this reinterpretation

of Islam as solely about submission rather than peace is perceived as a conspiracy against their religion. This contends that the viewpoint undermines the significance of defending Muslim land and people. Consequently, there is tension between those who advocate for a peaceful interpretation of Islam and those who prioritize the concept of submission and its implications for self-defence.

On the other hand, the influence of Orientalism has led to a shift in the mindset of several intellectuals, resulting in anti-Islamic sentiments or a reluctance to acknowledge the positive contributions of Islam, particularly concerning peace-making (Zaidi, 2019, p. 56). Consequently, a cultural and identity dynamic has emerged over time. Conversely, this attitude among Muslim intellectuals has inadvertently encouraged extremists who portray themselves as the sole defenders of Islam. They exploit this narrative to recruit supporters and propagate their ideologies. Consequently, a culture of "us against them" has become pervasive. As Said (2003) argues, the construction of identity involves the establishment of opposing groups, perpetuating a cycle of interpretation and reinterpretation of differences between "us" and "others" (Said, 1979, p. 45).

The role of religion in peacebuilding, particularly within Islam, has been extensively debated. However, scholars have also presented a counterargument, as exemplified by Huntington in his book "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order" (Huntington, 1996, p. 67). This perspective challenges the simplistic notion that an authentic religion, devoid of violent or "alien" elements, inherently promotes peace. Omer (2015) emphasizes the need to critically rethink religious peace-building, moving beyond essentialist interpretations that overlook complexities and historical contexts. Moreover, the author highlights the importance of aligning religious peace-building efforts with broader peace-building objectives, underscoring the requirement for nuanced and reflective approaches (Omer, 2015, p. 3).

Several non-Muslims acknowledge Islam's role in promoting peace. Esposito and Yilmaz (2010) assert that Islam, as a religion and a tradition, contains abundant teachings and practices related to peace-building (John L. Esposito and Ihsan Yilmaz, 2010, p. 15). They argue that this has been evident since the inception of Islam in Arabia, a time when Arabs lacked mercy and tolerance towards their adversaries (Ihsan Yilmaz and John Esposito, 2010, p. 10). Additionally, Afsaruddin (2008) highlights the Qur'anic concept of "talif al-qulub," which emphasizes the importance of reconciling hearts and fostering friendship and alliances with various groups, including new converts to Islam and non-Muslims such as Jews, Christians, and even polytheists (Afsaruddin, *Taking Faith to Heart: Reconciliation and Peacebuilding in Islam*, 2008, p. 220). A study on peace-building in Islam highlights religion's positive role in conflict resolution. Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), including Muslim groups, offer support, mediation, and reconciliation. They engage in various activities but face challenges like proselytization risks and measurement difficulties. Muslim peace-building organizations are hard to identify, yet collaboration between faith-based and secular efforts shows promise. FBOs mainly target religious moderates, recognizing their potential and acknowledging limitations in addressing inequality (Joseph, 2023, p. 25).

When concerning global peace or violence, the activities of Islamist groups cannot be overlooked. Some of these groups utilize religious radicalization to propagate extremism among Muslims worldwide. However, it is argued that Muslims may reject violence if they are exposed to the peace teachings inherent in Islamic primary sources and recurring rituals. A study explored avenues and values for peace-building within Islam as a religious tradition, mainly focusing on how Islamic rituals like Hajj could foster peace-making among Muslims, notably in Ghana. The findings revealed that Islam is rich in peacebuilding values such as forgiveness, reconciliation, compassion, justice, and tolerance. It suggests that amid Ghana's fragile peace,

Muslim and non-Muslim religious entities should collaborate on social projects to facilitate positive interactions between them (Zagoon-Sayeed, 2018, p. 67).

Challenges and Perceptions of Tolerance in Islam

Islam frequently faces accusations of violence and non-peacefulness from both non-Muslims and certain Muslim intellectuals. Often, examples of terrorism support these claims. Extremist factions, both violent and non-violent, exploit these criticisms to garner support among Muslim youth, framing their narrative as a defence against perceived plots targeting Islam (VandenBerg, 2020, p. 45). They categorize Muslim societies into various labels, branding them as deviating from their interpretation of mainstream Islam. Paradoxically, the more severe the critiques against Islam, the greater the recruitment potential for these extremists (Harriet Allan, Andrew Glazzard, Sasha Jesperson, Sneha Reddy-Tumu, and Emily Winterbotham, 2015, p. 33) and (Wiktorowicz, 2005, p. 78)

Joseph S. Nye (2004) contends that "some Islamist extremists' resort to terror to enforce a return to what they depict as a purer, premodern form of their religion". However, the issue extends beyond extremist actions to encompass broader reactions, leading to Islamophobia and a decrease in tolerance toward Muslim communities in certain societies. Addressing this requires a political response from the global Muslim community to counter such distortions. Furthermore, the diminishing religious tolerance toward Muslims has repercussions beyond individual societies. Moreover, a decline in religious tolerance towards Muslims damages the perception of the United States in Muslim-majority countries like Pakistan, Indonesia, and the Arab world (Nye, 2005, p. 56). This underscores the interconnectedness of attitudes toward Islam and their impact on international relations.

Harnessing Islam's Soft Power

Like numerous other faiths, Islam possesses considerable soft power capabilities. Organized religious movements have wielded soft power for centuries, influencing individual interactions and governmental policies. Within Islam, this soft power extends from individuals and families to entire societies and governments, offering potential solutions to various societal challenges (Nye, 2005, p. 45) and (Haseeb Shabbir, Paul Baines, Dianne Dean and Kurt Braddock, 2024, p. 95).

Institutions like the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London recognize the importance of these soft skills, offering courses such as "Political Society in the Middle East" at the postgraduate level (SOAS, n.d.). However, there has been a notable shift in recent times where governments seek to leverage Islam's soft power for political gain. Peter Mandaville and Shadi Hamid (2018) emphasize that using Islamic soft power often serves governmental interests more than the welfare of Muslim populations (Peter Mandaville and Shadi Hamid, 2018). This trend is not unique to Islam, as many religions worldwide, mainly those prevalent across multiple states, may be subject to similar instrumentalization for political ends. Nevertheless, religion's soft power can prove invaluable, especially in failed states where centralized authority has collapsed. Yet, organized religion remains a cohesive force, as observed by Harold Coward and Gordon S. Smith (Harold Coward and Gordon S. Smith, 2004, p. 67).

Islam's Rejection of Violence

Despite widespread portrayals associating Islam with violence, it is crucial to recognize that the overwhelming trend among Muslim individuals, scholars, and leaders is to denounce terrorism perpetrated in the name of religion unequivocally. As articulated by David Smock and Qamar-ul Huda (2009), most critical Muslim figures have consistently condemned significant acts of violence, such as the September 11, 2001, attacks and subsequent acts

attributed to Islam (David Smock and Qamar-ul Huda, 2009, p. 12). This stance is echoed by the vast majority of Muslim scholars and individuals, many of whom are actively engaged in combating the toxic ideologies propagated by extremists.

Voices of Islam for Peace

Emerging voices, particularly among young activists, are spearheading efforts to challenge extremist narratives and promote a more tolerant interpretation of Islam. One notable figure in this movement is the young Muslim televangelist Moez Masoud, whose influential platform reaches millions of viewers across North Africa. Masoud represents a new wave of Muslim leaders who advocate for an upbeat and tolerant brand of Islam. Abdallah Schleifer, an expert on Islam and electronic media, observes that Masoud and others champion a "sweet orthodoxy," emphasizing the values of humanity and compassion (David Smock and Qamar-ul Huda, 2009).

The vast diversity within the Islamic intellectual tradition sheds light on how a wide range of behaviors and actions, including violent and non-violent, can find justification under Islam. This diversity is evident in the multitude of interpretations within Sunni Islam, as exemplified by the emergence of four primary schools of thought in the eighth and ninth centuries (Salvatore, 2009, p. 18). While Shiite interpretations diverge from these Sunni legal schools, historical evidence points to shared legal, philosophical, and theological interpretations between Sunnis and Shiites (Porter, 2012, p. 45).

Despite this, numerous efforts have been made to reform traditional understandings of textual interpretations, particularly by certain extremists. In the past fifty years, Muslim scholars from various backgrounds have contributed significant new interpretations, addressing concerns such as applying Islamic principles regarding peace and war, governance, economics, social involvement, banking, human rights, education, and democracy (Pohl, 2006, p. 395) and (Sarfaroz Niyozov & Nadeem Memon, 2011, p. 12). These endeavours aim to contribute to discussions on Islam and peacebuilding.

Indeed, Islam stands ready to contribute to peace-building efforts whenever called upon. However, the unwarranted attacks on Islam from non-Muslim and sometimes even Muslim sources often impede these endeavours, fuelling the rise of extremist narratives instead. This situation underscores the intolerance faced by the religion, prompting extremist factions to feel compelled to defend it. It is a common phenomenon that oppression of religion tends to strengthen the sense of affiliation among religious and non-religious individuals (Mustafa, 2020, p. 89). The example of Bosnian Muslims, as Smith (1987) highlighted, illustrates this dynamic well. In Yugoslavia, the Muslims of Bosnia opted to identify themselves as "Muslim" in the national census, reflecting a response to religious and ethnic pressures (Smith, 1991, p. 45). Similar dynamics were observed in Muslim-majority regions within the former Soviet Union, Israel, and Pakistan, where religion played a significant role in the formation of nation-states (Mustafa, 2020, p. 18).

METHODS

This study employs an extrapolation approach to analyse trends and patterns in the attitudes and behaviours of Muslim intellectuals regarding the promotion of peace within Islam. According to Mun, Morton Glantz, and Johnathan (2011), this method is beneficial when significant changes are not anticipated, meaning that causal factors are expected to remain consistent or when these factors are not clearly understood (Mun, 2012). Extrapolation proves ideal for this study, given that the prevailing negative phenomenon among most Muslim

intellectuals persists, with no noticeable progress. The initial hypothesis posits that most Muslim intellectuals lack a definitive stance in promoting peace within their religion. By extrapolating from existing data and literature, the present research aims to uncover the factors leading to the unwillingness of Muslim scholars and their reluctance to engage in peace-building efforts actively.

A comprehensive review of existing literature, including academic articles, books, reports, and online sources, was conducted to gather data on the perspectives, experiences, and challenges of Muslim intellectuals in promoting peace within Islam through various search engines such as Google Scholar, Springer Link, Research Gate, and JSTOR. The extrapolation technique was applied to analyse data to identify trends and patterns in the involvement of Muslim intellectuals in peace advocacy within Islam. These trends were then projected to predict potential outcomes and developments in promoting peace within Islam. The extrapolated findings were interpreted to conclude the potential trajectory of the involvement of Muslim intellectuals in advocating for peace within Islam.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

The findings of this study reveal that Muslim intellectuals occupy a highly strategic position in promoting peace within Islam; however, this role has not been optimally implemented in contemporary society. Based on the extrapolative analysis of existing literature and scholarly discussions, the study found that many Muslim intellectuals tend to remain silent or passive in responding to the growing narratives of extremism and radicalism carried out in the name of Islam. This condition has created a significant discursive vacuum that is often exploited by extremist groups to portray themselves as the sole defenders and authentic representatives of Islam. Consequently, the image of Islam as a religion that promotes peace, tolerance, compassion, and coexistence has increasingly been distorted within global public discourse.

The study further demonstrates that the reluctance of Muslim intellectuals to actively advocate for peace within Islam is closely associated with a lack of confidence in articulating and defending Islamic teachings comprehensively. Some intellectuals avoid direct engagement in peace-related religious discussions due to concerns about criticism, political labeling, or social backlash. This hesitation indirectly contributes to the expansion of extremist narratives, as radical groups are allowed to dominate religious discourse and manipulate Islamic teachings for ideological and political purposes.

Another important finding indicates that the rise of Islamophobia and persistent negative portrayals of Islam have intensified the challenges faced by Muslim intellectuals. Global narratives frequently associating Islam with violence, terrorism, and intolerance have created an environment in which many Muslim intellectuals feel discouraged from publicly engaging in discussions concerning Islam and peacebuilding. This situation not only weakens efforts to promote the peaceful values of Islam but also reinforces negative stereotypes toward Muslims in various societies. In this context, the silence of Muslim intellectuals unintentionally contributes to the persistence of misconceptions about Islam and provides extremist groups with greater opportunities to recruit followers and legitimize their radical ideologies.

The study also identifies the existence of political and ideological dilemmas among Muslim intellectuals. The polarization between Islamist and non-Islamist groups has caused many intellectuals to adopt neutral or passive positions in order to avoid being associated with

particular political ideologies or movements. As a result, the mission of promoting peace within Islam has failed to gain broad collective support from the wider Muslim intellectual community. This finding reflects the fragmentation of contemporary Muslim intellectual discourse, which ultimately weakens collective efforts to construct and disseminate a peaceful Islamic narrative.

On the other hand, the findings strongly affirm that Islam fundamentally contains rich values and teachings related to peacebuilding, including tolerance, reconciliation, compassion, justice, and social harmony. The literature reviewed in this study demonstrates that these principles have historically been embedded within Islamic teachings and intellectual traditions. Nevertheless, the limited involvement of Muslim intellectuals in promoting these peaceful values has caused the public visibility of Islam's peace-oriented teachings to remain overshadowed by extremist narratives that are more dominant in international media and political discourse.

Overall, this study concludes that strengthening the role of Muslim intellectuals is essential in reconstructing and disseminating a peaceful, moderate, and inclusive understanding of Islam. The active engagement of Muslim intellectuals is crucial in countering radicalism, reducing Islamophobia, and enhancing Islam's contribution to global peacebuilding efforts in line with international peace and security objectives.

Discussion

Numerous Muslim intellectuals refrain from actively advocating for the peace-oriented aspects of their religion for various reasons. The primary factors identified are:

Lack of confidence

Whether due to a lack of comprehensive understanding of Islam among the majority of Muslim intellectuals or a reluctance to take a stand in promoting the peaceful dimensions of Islam, the outcome remains consistent. This reticence among Muslim intellectuals is perceived as tacit support for extremists, regardless of whether they espouse violent or non-violent ideologies. Moreover, this silence assumes a negative stance on two fronts: firstly, it implies an endorsement of the notion that Islam inherently promotes violence (Abu-Nimer, 2000, p. 240), and secondly, it affords opportunities for anti-Islamic perspectives to persist in their condemnation of the faith, originating from both non-Muslims and even members within the Muslim community (Byrd, 2018, p. 67). Ultimately, such circumstances foster an environment conducive to the spread of extremism, contributing to the widening circle of deviation among those who transgress against the principles of Islam. The resulting spread of violence perpetrated by extremists inflicts threefold harm upon Islam, Muslims, and humanity at large (Meilahn, 2008, p. 10). Regrettably, this trend persists due to the continued silence of Muslim intellectuals, the persistent onslaught against Islam, and the abdication of the defence of Islam to extremists and their violent methodologies.

One reason why Muslim intellectuals may lack confidence, in their religion is their unawareness that Islam does not have a clergy system allowing anyone to represent the faith and offer interpretations of its teachings. Many extremists and terrorist leaders, like Bin Laden and Zarqawi despite not being scholars caused disasters, in the name of Islam. However moderate Muslim intellectuals did not defend Islam. Allowed these extremists and terrorists to operate under the guise of Islam. Therefore, any Muslim thinker who remains neutral in advocating for peace, within Islam is culpable as they indirectly assist extremists in co-opting Islam and using it to instil fear, in Muslims and non-Muslims.

Intense Criticism of Islam

The pervasive critique of Islam, emanating from both non-Muslim and Muslim intellectuals, as well as the media, has engendered what is commonly referred to as Islamophobia. While some, like Fred Halliday, view Islamophobia as a manifestation of anti-Muslim racism (Narzanin Massoumi, Tom Mills, and David Miller, 2017, p. 45), its impact on Muslim intellectuals often deters them from actively advocating for Islam and its message of peace. Consequently, it is humanity as a whole that suffers from the absence of Islam's peace-building efforts. Without the expected support from Muslim intellectuals, such endeavours are likely to yield little results while the prevailing environment continues to provide fertile ground for extremists. Despite this prevailing climate, there are notable instances of non-Muslim academics, such as John Esposito, making commendable efforts to understand Islam and its mission realistically (Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 2011, p. 78). Thus, the fear and hesitancy exhibited by Muslim intellectuals not only undermine Islam's potential for peace-making but also contribute to the proliferation of extremism and its harmful agenda against Muslims and non-Muslims as well (Kalin, 2019, p. 56).

Dilemma in Advocating for Peace

The prevalent apprehension among the vast majority of Muslim intellectuals stems from their reluctance to be associated with Islamist ideologies. In several Muslim-majority nations, society has become polarized into Islamist and non-Islamist factions, neither of which actively supports the advocacy of Islam's peace-making endeavours (Esposito, *The Future of Islam*, 2010, p. 112) and (Jermanová, 2010, p. 89). On the one hand, Islamist groups, including moderates, limit the support and promotion of broader Muslim intellectual involvement in promoting peace within Islam (Arifianto, 2019, p. 330) and (SCHWEDLER, 2011, p. 355). On the other hand, non-Islamist factions hinder their followers from engaging in such advocacy efforts (Desirée Nilsson and Isak Svensson, 2021, p. 625). There's also a sense among intellectuals that their respective factions would not tolerate them endorsing such a mission for Islam. Moreover, hyper-secular parties openly advocate for a complete anti-Islamic stance (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2023, p. 260) and (Ayoob, 2004, p. 8).

Consequently, intellectuals within non-Islamist groups and those who maintain a neutral stance on religious matters avoid being labelled as Islamists, leading them to remain silent on the issue (Richard C. Martin and Abbas Barzegar, 2009, p. 67). Ironically, this leaves the task of promoting Islam's mission of peace either to extremists or, in the best-case scenario, to moderate Islamists. Due to concerns over affiliation, the majority of non-Islamist intellectuals find themselves without a clear stance on the matter. As a result, this crucial mission of Islam lacks widespread support from the Muslim community.

CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the vital role of Muslim intellectuals in promoting peace within the Islamic community. The study employed the extrapolation approach to investigate the historical significance of religions in promoting peace, highlighting their positive contributions

that have been overshadowed by political manipulation. The study also emphasized the potential of Islam to promote peace while expressing concern about its limited recognition as a result of misinterpretations and the lack of vocal support from Muslim intellectuals. Extremists take advantage of this absence, presenting themselves as the only protectors of Islam while defaming Islam as a religion associated with terrorism. Although Islam possesses intrinsic soft power, its vulnerability to misinterpretation enables extremists to manipulate it.

Nevertheless, the possibility for modernization exists, albeit political motives frequently drive it. Currently, the lack of action among Muslim intellectuals highlights the insistent necessity to promote peace actively. However, the inactivity can be attributed to a

range of circumstances. First and foremost, a significant number of individuals lack trust in Islam because they have insufficient knowledge about it, which causes them to link it with acts of violence incorrectly. Furthermore, the widespread Islamophobia intensifies the challenge for Muslim intellectuals to advocate for peace within the Islamic community. Ultimately, their association with both Islamic and non-Islamic political parties create a division that obstructs their efforts to promote peace within the Islamic community.

The results show that Muslim thinkers are hesitant especially due, to Islamophobia and challenges in promoting peace in a divided landscape. This made the situation more difficult for the peace-making of Islam to help humanity, among them the Muslims. This aids extremist groups, in spreading a narrative that positions them as the protectors of Islam portraying their radical methods, as the sole way to preserve the faith. This manipulation of religion, for purposes not distort the core principles of Islam but also deepens rifts within societies leading to increased radicalization.

In today's world dealing with issues, like radicalization, Islamophobia and the misuse of religion requires intellectuals to reaffirm their dedication to upholding their principles of peace. While religions have the potential to promote peace the lack of vocalization, from thinkers on this issue leaves room for extremist organizations to manipulate. The role of intellectuals is crucial in influencing the discourse, on Islam and its values of harmony and living together peacefully. As representatives of wisdom, contemplation and understanding, in the faith these scholars have a role, in combating radical beliefs and upholding the authentic values of Islam as a religion that advocates for harmony.

In light of the increasing presence of factions manipulating beliefs for their own malicious purposes there is a pressing need for Muslim scholars to take proactive measures in reshaping the discourse and clarifying the true principles of Islam. This research highlighted the importance of Muslim scholars promoting peace within their faith in line, with the Sustainable Development Goal set by the United Nations for global peace and security.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

This is a sole author work, where the author independently conducted this research, and the project received no fund from anyone. The author was responsible for analysis, conceptualization, literature review, completing the writing and revision of the work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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